

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT PEREZ CONDEMNS LEFTIST LEADER'S DEATH;
FULL INVESTIGATION PROMISED

REF: CARACAS 9076

SUMMARY. PRESIDENT PEREZ JULY 27 CALLED THE DEATH OF LEFTIST LEADER RODRIGUEZ "UNSPEAKABLE" AND "UNJUSTIFIED," AND SAID THE GOV HOPES TO RESCUE NIEHOUS ALIVE. DISIP DIRECTOR LANDER RESIGNED AS A RESULT OF RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH. RODRIGUEZ'S AUTOPSY SHOWED THAT HE DIED OF INTERNAL BLEEDING AND A RUPTURED LIVER. INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE PROVIDED LIMITED DETAILS REGARDING THE INVOLVEMENT OF TWO DEPUTIES IN THE NIEHOUS KIDNAPPING. BOTH DEPUTIES HAVE PROCLAIMED THEIR INNOCENCE. RODRIGUE'S BURIAL DID NOT GENERATE ANY PUBLIC DISORDERS, ALTHOUGH LEFTIST GROUPS HAVE CALLED FOR THREE DAYS OF DEMONSTRATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESIDENT PEREZ MADE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT JULY 27 CONCERNING THE DEATH OF SOCIALIST LEAGUE LEADER JORGE RODRIGUEZ AT THE HANDS OF DISIP POLICEMEN. QUOTE. OF COURSE IT IS AN UNSPEAKABLE, UNJUSTIFIED ACT THAT HAPPENED TO MR. JORGE RODRIGUEZ, BUT THE IMPORTANT THING IN THE MIDST OF OUR INDIGNATION AT THIS EVENT IS HOW MY GOVERNMENT CONTINUES TO RESPECT THE
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DIGNITY OF HUMAN LIFE. THE FACT THAT A POLICE AGENT CAN COMMIT

EXCESSES AND BE GUILTY OF WRONGDOING COULD HAPPEN IN ANY COUNTRY AT ANY TIME. WHAT IS OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE IS THE INTEREST OF THE GOVERNMENT IN EACH CASE TO LET THE FULL WEIGHT OF THE LAW FALL WHERE IT MAY AND NOT COVERUP IN ANY WAY SITUATIONS OF THIS KIND. WE HAVE LEARNED FULLY WHAT HAPPENED TO MR. NIEHOUS AND WE HOPE TO RESCUE HIM ALIVE, BUT THIS, OF COURSE, IS AN IMPONDERABLE THAT IS NOT SOLELY IN THE HANDS OF THE GOVERNMENT. UNQUOTE.

2. AS EXPECTED, ARISTIDES LANDER, DIRECTOR OF THE GOV INTELLIGENCE SERVICE (DISIP), HANDED IN HIS RESIGNATION JULY 27 TO INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE, IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE INVESTIGATION INTO RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH. LANDER, MOREOVER, WROTE TO FISCAL GENERAL JOSE RAMON MEDINA ASKING MEDINA TO CARRY OUT A THOROUGH AND OPEN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INCIDENT. REPEATING HIS ORAL REQUEST OF JULY 25, LEPAGE ALSO WROTE TO MEDINA JULY 26 REQUESTING "THE MOST RIGOROUS INVESTIGATION POSSIBLE" IN VIEW OF THE LIKELY COMPLICITY OF DISIP OFFICIALS IN RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH. LEPAGE PROMISED THE GOV'S FULL COOPERATION IN BRINGING TO THE SURFACE ANY IRREGULARITIES COMMITTED BY POLICE OFFICIALS.

3. INTERIOR MINISTER OCTAVIO LEPAGE APPEARED BEFORE THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES JULY 27 TO PROVIDE SOME DETAILS CONCERNING THE INVOLVEMENT OF MEP DEPUTY SALOM MEZA AND INDEPENDENT DEPUTY FORTUNATO HERRERA IN THE NIEHOUS KIDNAPPING. ACCUSING BOTH DEPUTIES OF BEING ACCOMPLICES, LEPAGE SAID AN OWENS-ILLINOIS OFFICIAL CHARGED WITH PAYING THE RANSOM FOR NIEHOUS' RELEASE CONTACTED THE KIDNAPPERS THROUGH HERRERA. LEPAGE ADDED THAT FOUR WEEKS LATER VENEZUELAN INDUSTRIALIST EMILIO CONDE JAHN RECEIVED FROM MEZA REPLIES TO CERTAIN QUESTIONS, WHICH HAD BEEN CONVEYED TO THE KIDNAPPERS THROUGH HERRERA, INDICATING THAT NIEHOUS WAS STILL ALIVE.

4. REFERRING TO THE KIDNAPPING ITSELF, LEPAGE DISCARDED THE CLAIM OF NIEHOUS' ABDUCTORS THAT THEY HAD CHOSEN TO MAKE AN EXAMPLE OF NIEHOUS BECAUSE OF HIS COMPANY'S ANTI-VENEZUELAN ACTIVITIES. HE SAID HE COULD HAVE BELIEVE THIS IF THE KIDNAPPERS HAD CHOSEN AN OFFICIAL OF A MORE POWERFUL COMPANY "BUT NOT AN UNKNOWN FIRM LIKE OWNES-ILLINOIS." LEPAGE ALSO DISCOUNTED THE NOTION THAT THE KIDNAPPING AROSE FROM INTRIGUES AMONG LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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INDUSTRIALISTS. WHEN THE KIDNAPPERS ASKED FOR A RANSOM OF BS. 15 MILLION, LEPAGE SAID THE GOV DECIDED IT COULD NOT ALLOW PAYMENT BECAUSE IT WOULD ONLY HAVE LED TO OTHER ABDUCTIONS. HE CALLED THE FOUR DISIP OFFICIALS ACCUSED OF RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH "CRIMINALS AND IRRESPONSIBLE MEN" AND DISCLOSED THAT THREE OF THEM HAD ENTERED DISIP DURING THE PREVIOUS COPEI ADMINISTRATION. LASTLY, LEPAGE DENIED THAT HE WAS IN ANY WAY RESPONSIBLE FOR RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH NOR THAT HIS REPUTATION HAD BEEN

DAMAGED BY "THIS HORRIBLE CRIME."

5. DEPUTY HERRERA IMMEDIATELY DENOUNCED LEPAGE FOR HAVING LINKED HIS NAME WITH THE GROUP RESPONSIBLE FOR NIEHOUS' ABDUCTION. HE SAID THAT HE ACTED MERELY AS AN INTERMEDIARY, "THE SAME AS CARDINAL QUNITERO," AND THAT HE HAD MADE HIS ROLE KNOWN TO ANZOATEGUI STATE GOVERNOR PEDRO TABATA GUZMAN AND INTERIOR VICE MINISTER MARCO TULIO BRUNI CELLI AT THE TIME. STATING THAT HE HAD NEVER BEEN INVOLVED IN THE KIDNAPPING, DEPUTY MEZA DECLARED THAT LEPAGE'S ACCUSION WAS FALSE. HE ACCUSED LEPAGE OF MISGUIDING THE CHAMBER'S DEBATE BY THE CHARGES AGAINST TWO OF ITS MEMBERS AND CALLED FOR THE MINISTER'S RESIGNATION. SPEAKING FOR THE OPPOSITION COPEI PARTY, FLOOR LEADER EDUARDO FERNANDEZ SAID RODRIGUEZ'S DEATH WAS A DANGER SIGNAL FOR CONSTITUTIONAL RULE BECAUSE IT SHOWED THAT SOME AUTHORITIES EMPLOY TORTURE AND DEATH DESPITE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES. HE PROPOSED THAT THE CONGRESS APPOINT A SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE POLICE METHODS AND THE SITUATION OF DETAINEES AT DISIP.

6. THE CENTRAL UNIVERSITY (UCV) WAS THE SCENE OF MUCH ACTIVITY JULY 27 BECAUSE OF RODRIGUEZ'S PAST ASSOCIATION WITH UCV AND BECAUSE THE CAMPUS IS THE SOURCE OF MUCH OF THE SOCIALIST LEAGUE'S SUPPORT. AT A THREE-HOUR MEETING ATTENDED BY UCV RECTOR MIGUEL LEYRISSE AND MANY OF THE COUNTRY'S LEFTIST LEADERS RODRIGUEZ WAS EULOGIZED. A LARGE CORTEGE ACCOMPANIED RODRIGUEZ'S BODY THROUGH THE CITY TO THE CEMETERY WHERE RODRIGUEZ WAS BURIED. NO INCIDENTS OF ANY IMPORTANCE WERE REPORTED IN CARACAS JULY 27 ALTHOUGH SOME STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS OCCURRED IN BARCELONA, CUMANA, AND BARQUISIMETO. THE UCV ADMINISTRATION HAS PROCLAIMED A THREE-DAY MOURNING PERIOD ON THE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS.

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7. THE AUTOPSY PERFORMED ON RODRIGUEZ SHOWED THAT HE DIED OF INTERNAL BLEEDING, A RUPTURED LIVER, AND AN ABDOMINAL THORACIC CONTUSION. MEANWHILE, REPORTS FROM GUARICO STATE INDICATE THAT A LARGE-SCALE POLICE OPERATION IS UNDERWAY AROUND SAN JOSE DE GUARIBE, WHERE DEPUTY SALOM MEZA OWNS A FARM.

8. COMMENT: INTERIOR MINISTER LEPAGE'S LONG STATEMENT TO THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, AS WAS DISIP DIRECTOR LANDER'S RESIGNATION, APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN AN ATTEMPT TO DEFLECT CONGRESSIONAL CRITICISM OF LEPAGE'S HANDLING OF THE NIEHOUS CASE. HE HAS SUBTLELY IMPLICATED COPEI IN THE HIRING OF THREE OF THE FOUR DISIP OFFICIALS ACCUSED OF TORTURING RODRIGUEZ TO DEATH AND CAUSED A STORM BY CLAIMING THAT TWO DEPUTIES WERE INVOLVED IN THE NIEHOUS KIDNAPPING. WHETHER LEPAGE WILL BE ABLE TO

RIDE OUT THE STORM REMAINS TO BE SEEN BUT SO FAR HE HAS
BEEN COOL, DELIBERATE, AND IN CHARGE. HE WAS ROUNDLY APPLAUDED
BY HIS AD COLLEAGUES WHEN HE ENTERED THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES
LAST NIGHT.
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